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pony express

The pony express (1860-61) was a brief but spectacular experiment in rapid mail delivery from Missouri to California. Hoping to win a government contract, the freighting and express firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell promised to carry letters the almost 3,200 km (2,000 mi) between Saint Joseph, Mo., and Sacramento, Calif., in 10 days. This was half the time taken by the Overland Mail Company, which followed a longer route through the Southwest. To provide fresh mounts for riders, the company established 190 way stations 16-24 km (10-15 mi) apart along a route through Nebraska, Wyoming, and Nevada. The riders, who traveled about 120 km (75 mi) each in a relay system, carried the mail at a cost of \$5 an ounce, continuing even through the winter months. Successful logistically but not financially, Russell, Majors, and Waddell went bankrupt. Pony express service ended after 18 months, in October 1861, when overland telegraph connections were completed.

Elliott West

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